

## **ADDRESS BY DEPUTY PRESIDENT TM MBEKI, ON 1996 NATIONAL POPULATION CENSUS**

4 October 1996

Alexandra Township provides a fitting setting for the launch of the 1996 National Population Census. This Township is a good example of a community which is a product of the Apartheid past. It is a community which has been neglected, abandoned, and I dare to say, left to suffocate just in the backyard of some of the richest suburbs of our country.

Perhaps it should be easy to understand, indeed not difficult to imagine why Alexandra, this little settlement of a roughly five square kilometres, over the decades, has served as a setting for major struggles of our people against Apartheid laws.

I am saying it should be easy to understand why Alexandra has played this role if you have observed the conditions under which this community has lived over the years.

In his book, "Long Walk To Freedom", President Mandela describes what he observed about Alexandra almost fifty years ago. Most of you will agree that not much has changed in those fifty years. He says:

The Township's "atmosphere was alive, its spirit adventurous, its people resourceful...it could fairly be described as a slum, living testimony to the neglect of the authorities. The roads were unpaved and dirty, and filled with hungry, undernourished children scampering around half-naked...a single water tap served several houses. Pools of stinking, stagnant water full of maggots collected by the side of the road.

"Walking home at night was dangerous, for there were no lights, the silence pierced by yells, laughter and occasional gunfire. The township was overcrowded; every square foot was occupied by either a ramshackle house or a tin-roofed shack". (Page 88).

Over those decades, this township has initiated many campaigns in the struggle for democracy, in order to liberate the people from poverty, homelessness, ignorance and general want. It should come as no surprise that, out of proportion with the size of its population, Alexandra has got so many Members of Parliament in Cape Town who today are charged with the responsibility to lead the in their struggle deliver this country from the legacy of Apartheid.

We felt we should outline this short background merely to emphasise the point that the organisers of this event could not have found a better place for the launch of the 1996 National Population Census.

We need to pose a question to ourselves; Why do we need a census? Why is it important that, from time to time, people need to avail themselves to be counted?

I make bold to say that the success of reconstruction and development of our society depends to a very large extent on the success of a national population census. One cannot separate the revolutionary role of reconstruction, development and transformation of our communities from the importance of coming forward to be counted as a rightful citizen of our country.

I would like to look at the significance of counting a population as simple family economics. A mother who goes out to buy grocery, does so with a good knowledge of how many children she has in the family. She will not buy meat for two children if she has nine in the house. In the same way she cannot buy grocery for nine people if she is to feed only two stomachs. Part of the food will rot before it can be used.

The same question applies to national, provincial and local governments when it comes to planning for different communities. It is the question of planning, budgeting and establishing effective and efficient

delivery services. All these things cannot be done effectively and efficiently without having a fair sense of the number of people we are talking about.

Similarly, it is important for the guardian of the family to know how many sons and how many daughters she/he has in the family. It is part of planning and budgeting. For example, in the tradition of our communities, the more daughters we have, the more cattle for lobola we can hope to receive in the future. (In jest)

We have to know at the end of the day how many of the people are citizens and how many are immigrants. It is in the same way as the mother of the family has to know how many relatives are coming to visit for Christmas and hence how many people she should plan for in terms of food, accommodation and everything else that make their Christmas visit comfortable.

We need to know what access the population has to basic health care. How many clinics and hospitals are required. The same goes for the number of schools, community facilities and houses.

We need to know the extent of unemployment as well as the levels of poverty and illiteracy both in Alexandra and the rest of South Africa.

Census '96 should provide the information which will, in many cases, be central to South Africa's social and economic recovery. While we acknowledge that the task of transforming our country will not be completed overnight, our participation in Census '96 will ensure that we play our part in pressing forward the objective of national emancipation.

We appeal to all South Africans to allow those who will be counting to carry out their tasks without disruption, give them full co-operation and help them to arrive at accurate statistics.

When a hundred thousand of those who will be counting begin to visit our houses across the country in six days' time, South Africa must stand up proudly and say "Count Us In", because we all count in the building of a prosperous and better South Africa.

THANK YOU.